WARC

Snickers: You're not you when you're hungry

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Account Planning Group (UK), Gold, 2019

Summary

Snickers, the chocolate bar brand by Mars Incorporated, launched its You're Not You campaign to appeal to people aged 13-65 across the globe, without alienating its "young guys base", which resulted in increased sales growth and a bigger global market share.

- Snickers had predominantly targeted young men, but needed to appeal to men and women aged 13-65 to grow the business, which meant discarding the "stereotypical guy behaviours" from its ads.
- The brand embraced the universally appealing idea that people act out of character when they're hungry, and that snickers can sort them out.
- The campaign launched at the Super Bowl in 2010, and by 2012 had expanded to 54 other countries with TV spots and online video.
- By the time 54 markets had picked up the campaign, value sales growth was up 9.4 times, regaining a global market share equivalent to US $376.3 million.

Listen with Speechify
0:00 15:45

Campaign details

Brand: Snickers
Client: Mars
Agency: BBDO

Executive Summary

This is a paper about how the relentless pursuit of creative storytelling and rich emotional engagement can entice an audience back to one of the world's most beloved brands.

About how stories of goodness and communion can win out in a world fraught with difficulty and tension.

About acceptance in an increasingly intolerant era, and the beauty and power of friendship to get us through life's travails.

About a humble, everyday product making a real difference in people's lives.

Wait...

Hang on.

[eats a Snickers]

Sorry, don't know what we were on about there.

This is actually the story of 10 years of making people laugh and sorting out "hunger".

Good, old-fashioned brand planning and big ideas.

No fakes, no fuss, no pretence.

Hopefully it'll make you laugh too.

So keep a Snickers handy and read on...

'You're playing like Betty White out there.'

Snickers is one of the world's most popular chocolate bars. But in 2009 the brand was declining, and communications weren't working for the business.

The problem was compounded by the US. Historically Snickers, while overshadowed by Hershey's, Reese's and big brother M&M'S, had maintained a decent foothold in the US as the 4th largest brand through the consistent positioning around "hunger satisfaction." [1] But increasingly niche, jackass style humour was taking over the States and alienating a huge proportion of our consumer base. This was affecting our global performance, as the States represented almost 50% of Snickers' global sales.

To top it off, our communications around the globe were inconsistent and mostly tactical; we were a brand with a global footprint, but we did not behave like a global brand.

With our most important metric being penetration, we knew we had to become more consistently salient to consumers to stem US (and global) decline. Ultimately this would mean creating a communications framework that all markets could execute against, which was more populist in its appeal, to become as globally famous (salient) as possible.

This story is horrible.' (Kenny G)

Historically, the Snickers target has been predominantly young men who appreciate a substantial hunger-slaying product. But only appealing to young males was not going to be enough to grow the business within a competitive and impulsive category.

Therefore, to generate relevance and fame, our challenge involved growing our audience without alienating our young guys base: we needed to appeal to a broader audience, men and women from 13-65... basically anyone who has ever eaten a chocolate bar. It was going to be a tough ask finding a universal insight that united all of them.

So we started with an audit of our work globally.

Whilst all our markets executed by taking inspiration from guy culture, this didn't inherently feel problematic. It was more the overlay of stereotypical guy behaviours that was narrowing our appeal: for example, aligning ourselves with skateboarding in Mexico, or promoting ourselves as only for "real men" in the UK.

MARKET	STRATEGY	TARGET	CREATIVE DEVICE	CAMPAIGN
North America	Reinforce the product's credentials	Those who get narrow, niche, quirky humour	The distinctive parallelogram font	'Snacklish'
UK and Ireland	Stand up as the chocolate bar for 'real men'	Regular 'Blokes'	Mr T	'Get some nuts'
China	Emphasise the energy properties of the bar	Young, dynamic Chinese males	Various	'Game on'
Middle East	Act as the bar that brings mates together	Male youth	Football related activity	'Don't stop'
Western Europe	Position Snickers as the bar for when you have a big task to accomplish	Everyone	Hyperbolic, filmic dramatisations of enormous tasks	'Big Job'
Mexico	Align Snickers with street sports	Teens	Gritty, down-to-earth festivals	'Urbania'
Russia	Position Snickers as the bar for lapses in energy	Cool, emerging Russian youth	Transformer style films	'Don't stop'
Central and Eastern Europe	Reinforce the peanuts	Everyone	Flying peanuts	'Peanut power'

It felt logical not to throw away all of our equity in guy culture, what we really needed to do was ensure we were telling insightful and relatable stories that would appeal to everyone through this lens. So we commissioned research across Russia, Mexico, Dubai, the US, and Australia to find what young guys had in common across the globe.

It was harder than it first seemed. Some of the markets were really disparate: for example in Russia, physical strength was highly desirable and the highest compliment you could pay a friend. But in Australia, competitiveness in this way was seen as being the bane of their lives - something that was too reductive, and created unhealthy behaviours.

It turned out that acceptance, the desire for belonging, was the one thing that all guys could really unite behind. This concept of keeping up with your friends, participating in the banter, and having a laugh as equals is paramount to anything else. The act of breaking the group "code", such as being fussy or acting fake, is to be avoided at all costs.

This insight was so powerful we had to keep it at the heart of our brief. It was compelling for young guys, but it was easily relatable for just about anyone. The only job left was how to insert the product.

When thinking about this group mentality and the role that Snickers could play, we recognized a pivotal truth; that the "out of sorts" behaviour that would put your place in the group in jeopardy could be credibly caused by hunger. And Snickers is nothing if not a substantial eat. If anyone could own a positioning around sating hunger, it was Snickers.

All of these elements together provided us with the basis for our platform. If someone got hungry, and fell out of line with the pack behaviour, then the banter, the good-natured ribbing, and humour of their mates would get them back - with a bit of help from the well-timed delivery of a snack.

Because the truth is, we all act cranky, sleepy, hostile, or grouchy when we haven't eaten in a while, and no one notices more than our best friends.

We had a simple universal truth: *People act out of character when they're hungry; Snickers is best placed to sort them out.*

'Don't look at me like that honey, it's gonna be amazing.' (Willem Dafoe)

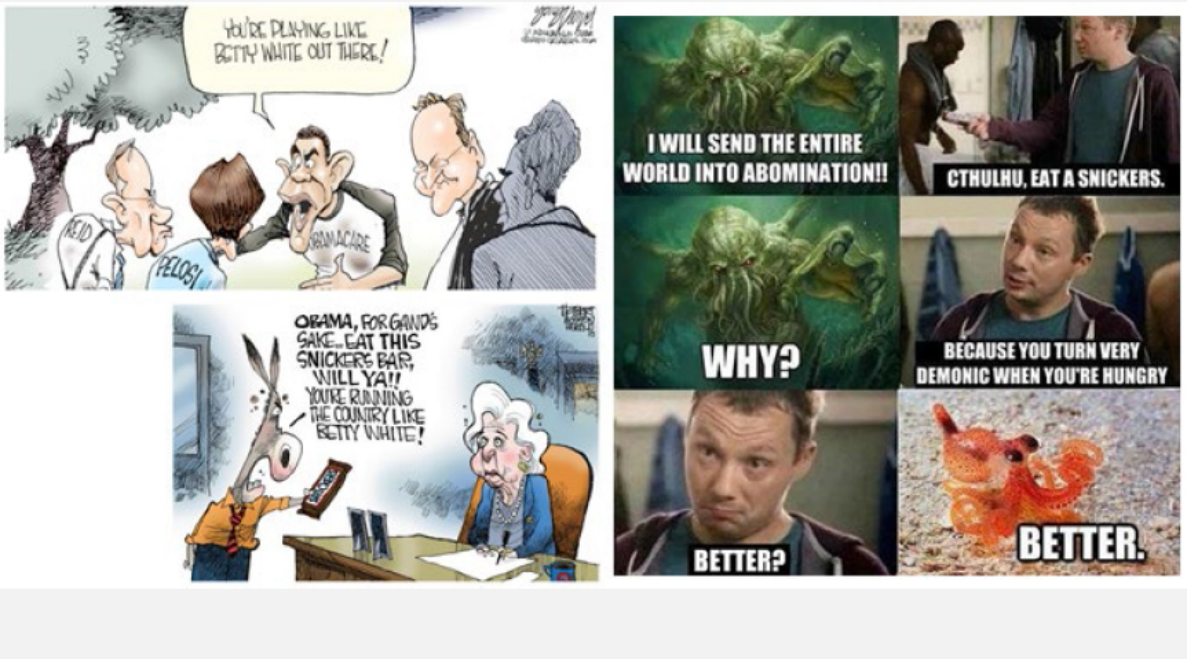
This strategy led to the soon-to-be-famous "You're Not You When You're Hungry" campaign.

"You're Not You When You're Hungry" gave us a human truth with broad relevance. To bring this truth to life, we used the juxtaposition of relatable, universal scenarios, with familiar celebrity faces that could credibly stand in for a specific hunger symptom, eg. Betty White for weak, or Joe Pesci for anger.

The incongruency of the celebrity in this otherwise normal scene got the campaign noticed; and using product as a solution to transform the celebrity back to the average person put our hunger satisfaction positioning at the centre.

Our first execution in the US, 'Game', launched on the biggest stage: Super Bowl, 2010. The debut ad was a massive hit. It was voted #1 on the USA Today Admeter, generated an 18,000% increase in YouTube searches, and drove over 400MM incremental and unpaid media impressions.[2]

Business impact was significant, immediate and global. And there was something else at play too. Consumers started appropriating Snickers' story, from political cartoons to Saturday Night Live sketches and consumer-generated memes. We had hit the nail on the head - this was a story everyone could relate to and, as a result, Snickers was becoming part of pop culture.



'Who'd want to smell like you?' (Joan Collins)

As more markets became excited about the campaign and it gained momentum, we started to see executions cropping up that took the idea and ran with it. Literally. We saw how easy it was to fall into the same trap as before with each market executing very different work, despite nominally following the platform, when very mixed in-market results started to come through. France and Germany's TV spot 'Gremlins' failed to kick start the campaign in their markets, and Russia struggled to adapt the self-deprecating sense of humour, relying instead on bombastic action scenes unlike our everyday approach to life.

To ensure we didn't slip back into old habits, we created some strategic guidance to ensure consistency between markets when executing the idea. Our tone of voice guidelines were:

What's the right way to tell this story?

We need to bring this story to life with the sort of real, honest humour that engages everyone.

If you wouldn't tell someone about it in the pub, it's not **humorous** enough.

If you'd feel uncomfortable chatting about it with your Dad, it's not **inclusive** enough.

If you've got to work at it, it's not **down-to-earth** enough.

With TV still being our most effective way to reach consumers globally, and therefore drive fame, we also looked at the successful formula from the States and what made it work:

With the new guidance, Germany continued their faith in the campaign subsequently airing 'Locker Room' from the UK, and China created their first effective copy 'Dragon Boat'. We realised that working within a tight brief not only created consistency, but also paved the way for better work.

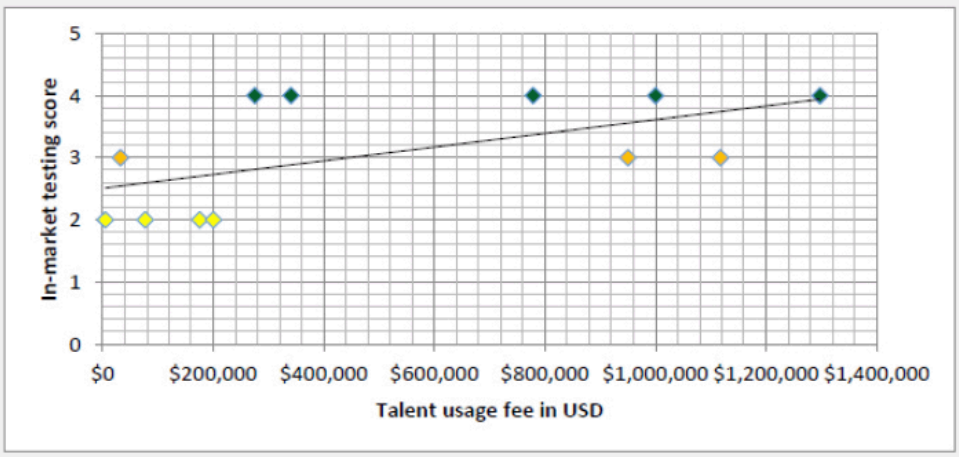
By 2012, "You're Not You When You're Hungry" had expanded to 54 countries. We had proven it could travel, now we needed to ensure it endured.

'Don't go breaking my heart...' (Elton John)

Unfortunately, the struggles of "You're Not You" in some of these countries somewhat tarnished its reputation, with some markets beginning to question whether the insight at the heart of the work resonated with their culture.

We had to work double time to ensure that we were isolating the true cause of any hiccups in the global rollout, and so created a comparative analysis of each TV copy to see whether our problem still lay in execution or insight.

What we found was that the markets who had been struggling the most were the ones who were investing the least in their talent.

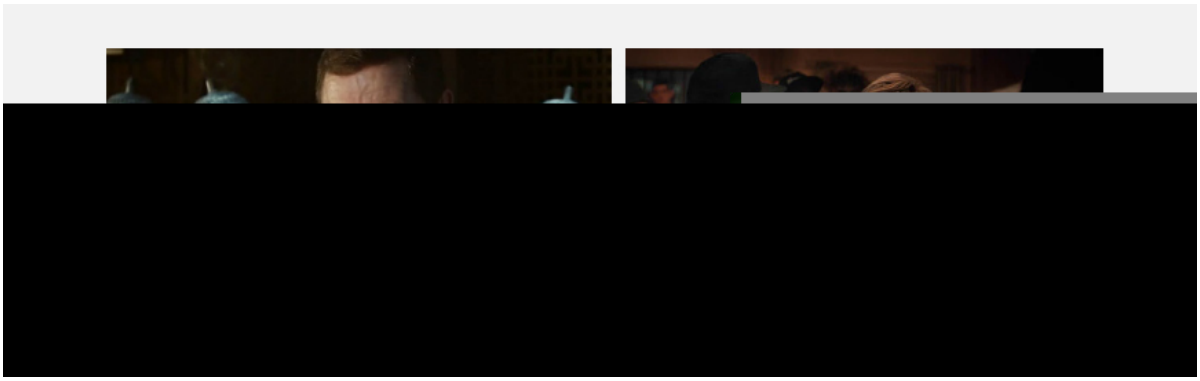


source: **AMV analysis**

This supported our earlier hypotheses that choosing the celebrity to represent a relevant "hunger symptom" was an incredibly important part of the creative process. The casting of Betty White in 'Game' was integral to the fame and continued conversation that happened after launch. Without the fame attached to someone like Betty White, the incongruency of their character within the script was lost, and with that a huge part of the humour and sharability of the work.

But not every market has the budget to pay out big bucks for celebrity talent. So we tried a new tactic (as referenced in the IPA paper Thinking like a Hollywood blockbuster'), pooling together resources across markets to create one TV spot that would run in multiple countries. The result was 'Bean Kung Fu', launched in 2014 and starring Rowan Atkinson, which not only passed in-market testing in our problematic markets (Russia, the UK, and Australia) but also picked up two IPA Effectiveness Awards.

In fact, Bean Kung Fu was so successful it demanded a sequel, delivered in 2018: Elton John in our 'Rap Battle' TV spot is now running in Russia, Mexico, the UK, Israel, Germany, and multiple other European markets.



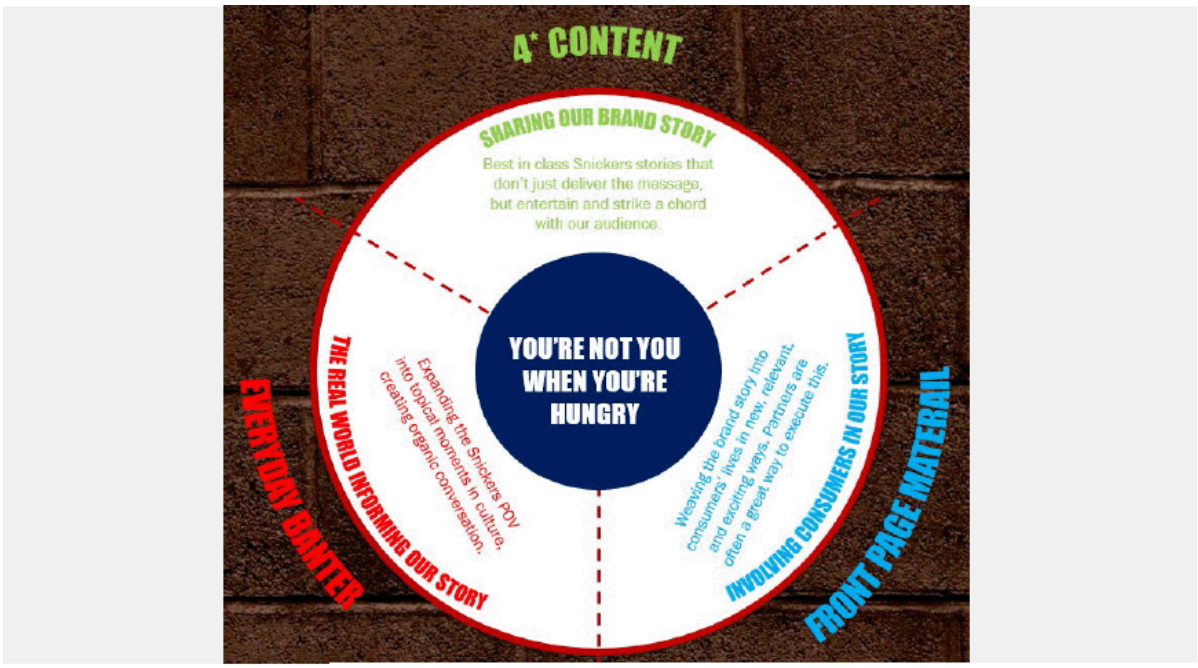
'Oh Jeremiah, you have saved this town.' (Adam Driver)

Our next challenge lay in changing media consumption. As a chocolate bar that almost everyone has eaten (at least once), it is a serious issue when young people stop engaging with your primary channel - that is, the decline in live TV viewership amongst young people was causing issues all over the globe, as TV has formed the foundation of Mars Inc's media approach for years.

For Snickers in 2015 this meant a sudden dive into the world of social and "reactive" social. The media rationale for wanting to be where young people were undoubtedly congregating was sound, and a few trials proved that the campaign was transferable.

However, when applied across a whole year, we quickly realized it was not a sustainable approach. There were certainly off-game moments happening in the world, but there weren't enough transcending into popular culture that we could riff off. To deliver on our objective of driving fame and penetration, we were going to need to look elsewhere.

The unlock was in recognising that whilst social was the right channel to reach consumers in, the "reactive" nature of it was not right for an always-on brand. So, to compensate for the moments when social would be dark, we created two complementary strands of digital activity that were pre-planned. One would be similar to our always-on approach to TV but in online video formats (eg. YouTube Skippables), and the other would be single-mindedly focused on creating big fame-driving activations in "tent pole" moments across the year.



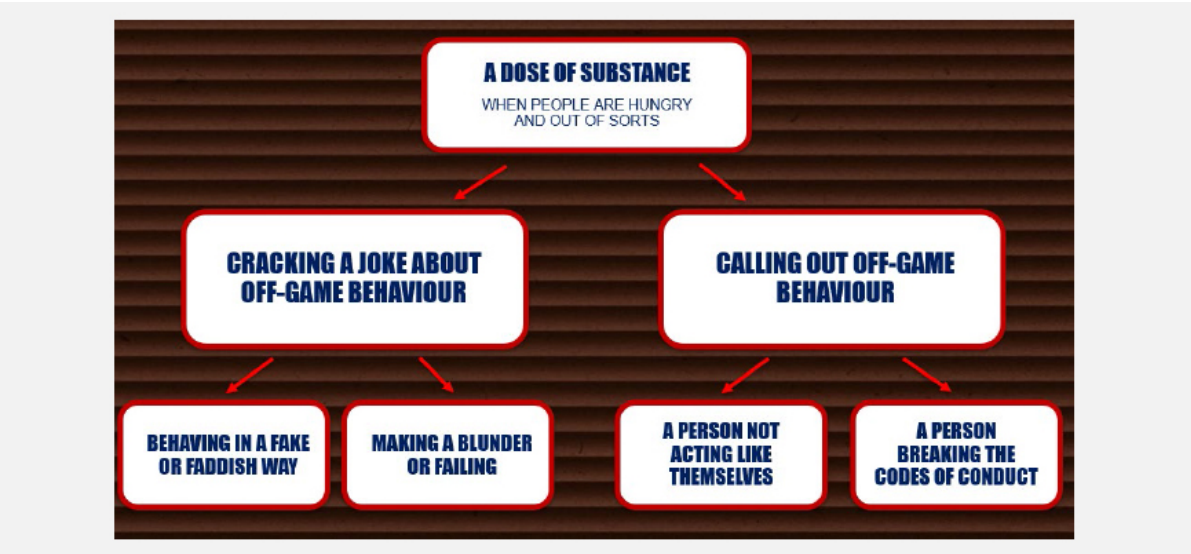
This strand triggered an explosion of creativity in its trial market, the UK: in 2016, the UK created a Valentine's Day activation and partnered with Comic Con, Spotify, and Dave (the TV channel).

This challenge helped us inject fresh blood into the campaign, moving it on from its heartland in TV and giving it a new lease of life, which was reflected in the plethora of awards won by this round of work at the FAB awards, Creative Circle, One Show, Brand Film Festival, and even a shortlist at Cannes for the Spotify Hunger Spotter.

But we still weren't done with social.

On further analysis of the Suarez and Clarkson tweets, we saw an interesting opportunity for Snickers. In the reductive and short dwell-time of social, we normally did not have time to tell the entire brand story from our TV. What had worked well for us in these tweets was that, coincidentally, popular culture had done a lot of the hard work in providing a hunger narrative (Suarez bit Chiellini, Clarkson punched a producer over his dinner options) that also displayed some serious off-game behaviour. All Snickers had had to do was turn up and comment how our substantial hunger-busting product would have prevented the situation happening.

This inspired us to write a 'brand role' for Snickers for those channels in which we didn't have 30 seconds to explain a story - instead defining how the brand would show up and behave.



'Zip it, shrimpy.' (Joan Collins)

Probably our biggest challenge to date has been negotiating our relationship with retailers. As an impulse product, retailers play a pivotal role in increasing our salience and accessibility - from incremental sitings to prime shelf locations. But translating a TV campaign to a shelf wobbler is incredibly difficult.

Traditionally we had relied on variant launches or promotional spend to secure us the best space, but we were convinced that joining up our brand personality above and below the line was the most powerful way for us to activate in store.

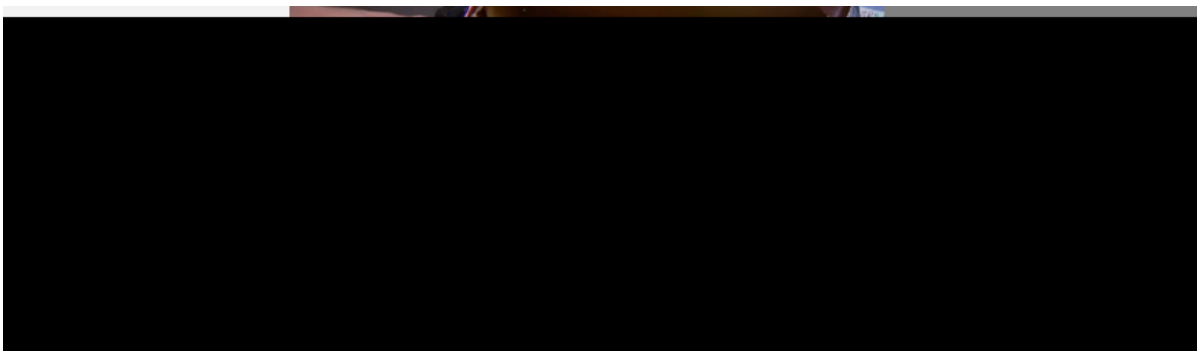
This suddenly became a viable tactic after we had defined our brand role. By moving away from having to explain the full "You're Not You" story on POS units, we opened up a much wider remit for creative opportunity.

Bringing 'hunger' to pack (2015):

Our first foray into store brought "a dose of substance" story to our most valuable asset - our packaging. We printed 20 unique 'hunger symptoms' on bars like "dramatic" and "diva" to link back to "You're Not You", allowing consumers the ability to identify their own off-game behaviour - or that of their friends - and solving it with a Snickers bar.

"Hunger Bars" drove 16% growth of single bar sales vs. year ago in the first four weeks, followed by 9% growth through Q4, significantly outperforming the 3% growth objective.

In the coming years, the US would introduce four new rounds of symptoms, and the activation would spread across the world, spawning new fame-driving interpretations like: "Stop the Hunger" in the Middle East, which won a Cannes lion; a partnership with Shazam in Russia, which won 20 different awards including 3 Effies; and a partnership with live-stream gaming platform Twitch in the US, which was also recognised at Cannes, the ADDYs and the FAB awards.



Real-time social hunger tracking in Australia (2016):

Picking up the baton in Australia, Snickers found an interesting cultural truth: Millennials' social feeds seemed pretty angry. Perhaps hunger was at play and Snickers could help?

So we developed the "Hungerithm," a hunger-tracking algorithm that monitored the mood of Twitter in real time and priced Snickers exclusively at 7-Eleven accordingly. The angrier the Internet was, the cheaper Snickers became.

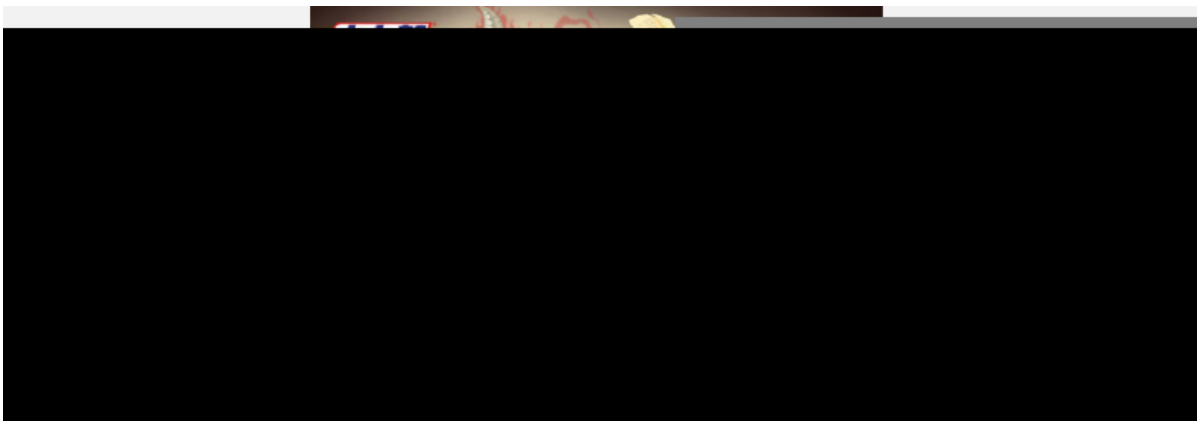
This 5-week activation reached 4 million Millennials, and driving a 35% unit-sales lift for the brand at 7-Eleven. Hungerithm was also recognised at Cannes, winning an astounding 22 Cannes lions.

Gaming breaks for China's hungry studying students (2016):

Facing the challenge of a small and emerging category, with no historic ties in to Chinese culture, Snickers inserted themselves into a highly relevant moment for young people: the threat of hunger whilst studying for the gruelling "Gaokao" exam. Snickers created special exam packs available online and in-store and launched an online game where teens defeated monsters who personified testing-related hunger symptoms.

Snickers awareness grew 15% with students, negative off-take growth turned positive from the previous quarter, and e-commerce sales value in April grew 20x year-over-year.

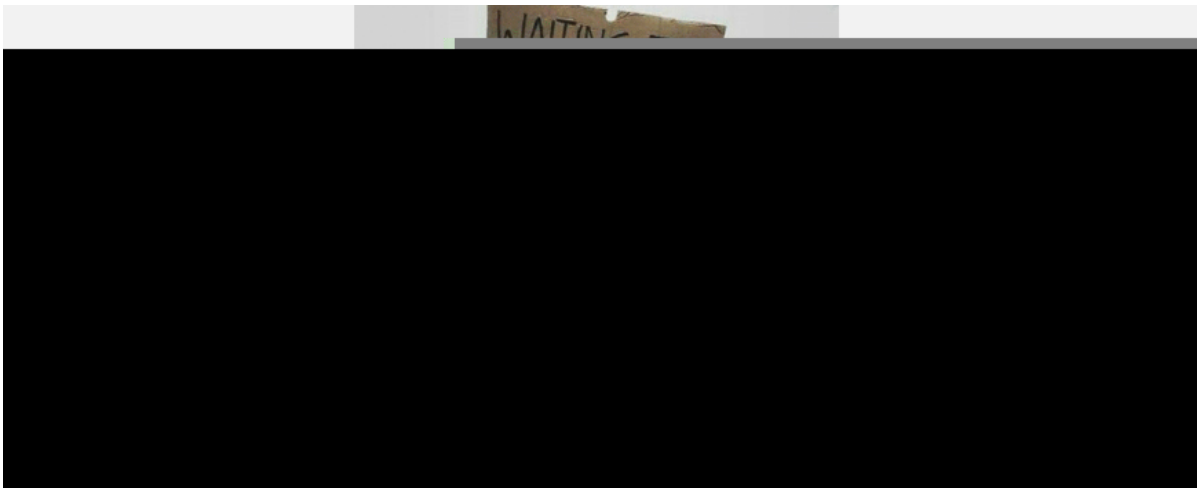
This was so successful we have repeated the activation every year in China, and have also branched out into marking the annual "Chunyun" migration for the Spring Festival.



Tactically speaking, we've utilized every element of the marketing mix to land the 'You're Not You' message, from packaging to influencers to guerilla marketing. It's the duality of harnessing a universal insight and committing to an ambition of fame and relevance which has kept the idea fresh and growing past TV executions or one-off fame-driving ideas.

"Whaddya model, gloves?" (Joe Pesci)

Ten years on, 'You're Not You' is a globally iconic campaign that is talked about, written about, and modelled the world over. It has returned Snickers to being the #1 chocolate bar in the world, has appeared in nearly every major news outlet, and has inspired millions to tell their own Snickers stories along the way.



By the time that 54 markets had picked up the campaign, value sales growth was up 9.4 times, regaining global market share equivalent to US$ 376.3 million.

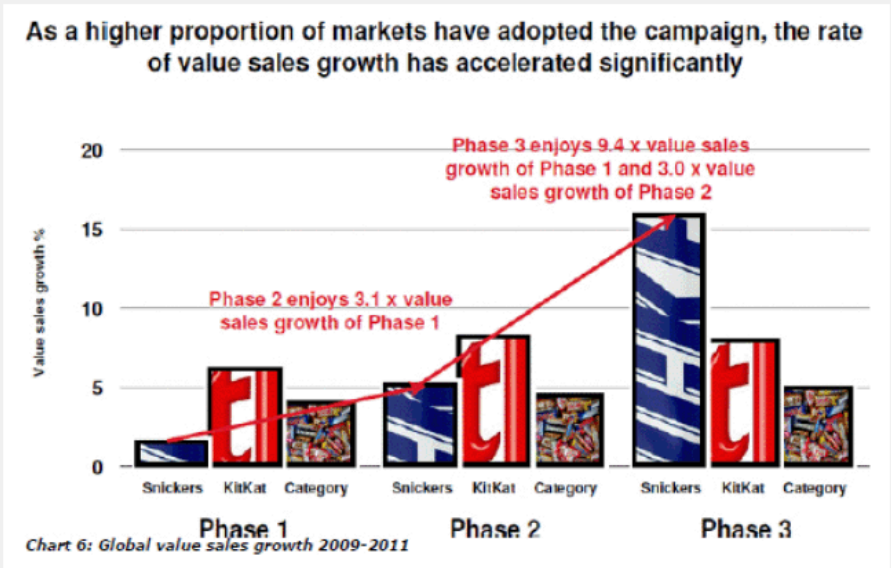


Chart 6: Global value sales growth 2009-2011

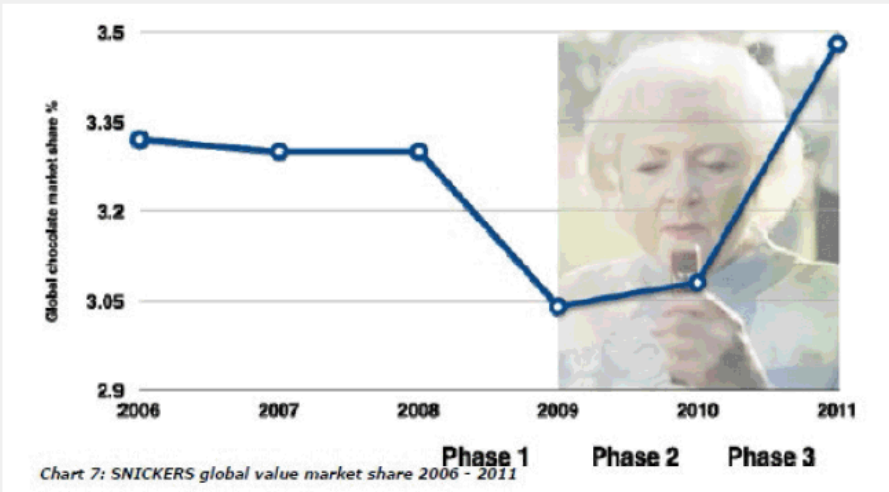


Chart 7: SNICKERS global value market share 2006 - 2011

We've learned some things along the way that have helped us hone and sharpen. But the key has been to remain committed - to uncover a universal human truth, to connect that to our product, and then to overcommit to it for almost 10 years, with some ups and downs along the way, to ensure it stays relevant and salient.

There are two key lessons we'd like to leave you with as we wind down:

The power of distinctive memory structures

For over 60 years, Snickers has told stories of Hunger Satisfaction and built a bold and substantial visual identity rooted in our brand colours of red, blue and brown. We have always measured how ownable and distinct these assets are for the business, because they improve the chance of being recalled or noticed in buying situations. What we've come to realise with "You're Not You" is that being distinctive is not just about standing out on shelf, and one of our most important memory structures is the one that consumers choose to riff off and bring in to their own lives, as they are then building our salience for us - unprompted.

Refusing to be penned in by constraints

From markets telling us that the campaign isn't aspirational enough, to media owners saying we'd be better off just flashing up a brand logo, to retailers saying that we aren't stacking up against competitors, the most important thing we've learnt is the mindset of never accepting defeat.

Some of our biggest challenges have resulted in our best and most awarded work. As David Ogilvy said, "Give me the freedom of a tight brief".

"You're Not You When You're Hungry" is now one of the world's most loved and celebrated campaigns, winning every creative award, and being the only campaign in history to win global effectiveness awards at Cannes, IPA, APG and the Effies - all in less than 10 years.

Footnotes

1. IRI Brand Ranking read-out
2. 2010 Super Bowl ad media tracker

Topics

Confectionery (http://www.warc.com//search/Food?l3=Confectionery) | **Global** (http://www.warc.com//search/Global?l3=Global) | **Strategy** (http://www.warc.com//search/strategy-pillar?l3=Strategy)

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